

Movie review—October Sky

Rating: PG

Year of Release: 1999

Time: 108 minutes

Cast: Laura Dern, Chris Cooper, Jake Gyllenhaal, Chris Owen, William Lee Scott, Roy Lee, Chad Lindberg.

October Sky is the true story of the childhood of Homer Hickam, a retired NASA engineer and an author. He has penned *The Coalwood Way*, *Torpedo Junction* and *Rocket Boys* (which incidentally is what the movie *October Sky* is based upon.)

The movie takes place in 1957 in the town of Coalwood, Virginia. The Soviet satellite, Sputnik was just launched and the 14-year old Homer (Jake Gyllenhaal) suddenly fell in love with the idea of space travel after he saw it cross the sky above his home. Unfortunately his father, John Hickam (Chris Cooper) is the local coal mine's boss, and he expects his son to follow in his footsteps.

Homer defies his father's wishes and starts building model rockets as a hobby. Unfortunately, his first several rockets are busts – literally. His first model rocket blows up his mother's freshly painted white picket fence. His next rockets blow up as well. Some don't take off at all and simply explode on the launch pad. Others make it a few feet in the air and then explode.

Homer and his friends were losing hope, but not interest. With the support and interest of Miss Frieda Riley (Laura Dern), his science teacher, he and his friends continue to plod on their course. Miss Riley suggests that the boys enter their project in the school science fair.

Finally, Homer's group manages to construct a working rocket. It sails in the air and is found several miles away after it lands. Homer and the boys are elated, as is Miss Riley. Word gets around and soon the whole town is entranced with the notion of rockets and everyone shows up at the slag field to see the launches – except his father.

DISCUSSION TOPICS - Making difficult decisions, being true to yourself, family relationships, physics, using explosives, tolerance, taking risks.